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Year of the Ox Stamp Celebrates Lunar New Year **New York City Chinese-American Artist Creates 12 Stamp Series**

A high-resolution image of the stamp is available to media only by e-mailing mark.r.saunders@usps.gov

NEW YORK — The U.S. Postal Service dedicated the *Celebrating Lunar New Year: Year of the Ox* commemorative 12-stamp souvenir sheet today as the second in its 12-year *Celebrating Lunar New Year* series. The ceremony took place in New York City at the Fashion Institute of Technology, where Chinese-American stamp artist Kam Mak serves as an associate professor of illustration. All 60 million 42-cent First-Class stamps are available nationwide today.

“We believe it’s vital that our stamp program should reflect our country’s high regard for its magnificent multi-cultural heritage,” said Postal Service Senior Vice President, Mailing Services, David B. Shoenfeld. “We are happy to celebrate that heritage today. The start of the Lunar New Year is the biggest holiday of the year for one of every four people in the world. It’s a time of celebration and reflection for millions of Americans, including our nation’s largest Chinese-American community, here in New York City.”

Joining Shoenfeld in dedicating the stamp were stamp artist Mak; President, Organization of Chinese Americans Ginny Gong; and Fashion Institute of Technology President Dr. Joyce F. Brown.

“I am so fortunate to be given the opportunity to showcase my cultural heritage through the Lunar New Year stamp,” said Mak, who was born in Hong Kong and grew up in New York City’s Chinatown after his family moved to the U.S. in 1971. “As with most Chinese-Americans, I am very proud in that it recognizes the sacrifices previous generations made for this country, such as the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad.”

Creating the Stamp

Art director Ethel Kessler of Bethesda, MD, worked on the new series with Mak, who now lives in Brooklyn. They focused on some of the common ways the Lunar New Year Holiday is celebrated. To commemorate the Year of the Ox (Jan. 26, 2009 – Feb. 13, 2010), they chose a lion head of a type often worn at parades and other festivities. Dancers wear such heads, often made of papier-mâché and bamboo, as they perform for delighted crowds. Kam's 16" x 9.5" stamp illustration was originally created using oil paints on a fiberboard panel.

"The lion dance painting on the *Year of the Ox* stamp took me two and a half months to create," Mak explained. "I chose the lion dance because it is an important tradition that dates to the Han Dynasty in welcoming the new year. As a child growing up, the lion dance was always and still is the most anticipated event for me. I always have a preference for the green and black lion created in the style of the Fut San region of southern China. It was a joy painting the lion with all the intricate pattern and details on its head. I also chose to have the lion leaping off the stamp to signify it as ferocious and brave-hearted — two personality traits characteristic to this lion. I hope the *Year of the Ox* stamp will scare away evil spirits and bring everyone good luck for the New Year."

The Postal Service introduced its previous *Lunar New Year* stamps series in 1992 was designed and illustrated by Clarence Lee of Honolulu, HI. Mak, under Kessler's direction, is creating the second series that continues through 2019 with stamps for the years of the Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Ram, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Boar.

Chinese Lunar Calendar

The *Year of the Rat* stamp was issued in 2008. The Year of the Ox begins Jan. 26, 2009, and ends Feb. 13, 2010. The ox is the second of 12 animals associated with the Chinese lunar calendar. According to a legend, a race across a river determined their order in the cycle. The rat crossed by riding on the back of the ox, jumping ahead at the last minute to win the race.

Born in the Year of the Ox

People born in the year of a particular animal are said to share characteristics with that animal. Individuals born during the Year of the Ox are said to be hardworking, tolerant, and persistent. They are also thought of as strong and sometimes a bit stubborn. A sampling of noteworthy individuals born in the Year of the Ox include Diana, Princess of Wales; President-elect Barack Obama; former President Richard Nixon; former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; artist Vincent Van Gogh; singer Bruce Springsteen; boxer Oscar De La Hoya; and actors George Clooney, Bill Cosby, Jane Fonda, Morgan Freeman, Richard Gere and Dustin Hoffman.

20th Century Lunar New Year Calendar: Year of the Ox

Feb. 19, 1901 to Feb. 7, 1902

Feb. 6, 1913 to Jan. 25, 1914

Jan. 25, 1925 to Feb. 12, 1926

Feb. 11, 1937 to Jan. 30, 1938

Jan. 29, 1949 to Feb. 16, 1950

Feb. 15, 1961 to Feb. 4, 1962

Feb. 3, 1973 to Jan. 22, 1974

Feb. 20, 1985 to Feb. 8, 1986

Feb. 7, 1997 to Jan. 27, 1998

The lunar new year is celebrated primarily by people of Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tibetan and Mongolian heritage in many parts of the world. Parades, parties, and other special events are common. Images associated with some of these widespread customs are depicted in the Celebrating Lunar New Year series.

In the U.S. as elsewhere, the occasion is marked in various ways across many cultures. Dancers wearing a lion head such as the one depicted in the stamp art, often made of papier-mâché and bamboo, perform for delighted crowds. Lucky foods are eaten — pork sausage with cabbage is one example — and loud noises from firecrackers and drums are used to scare off evil spirits and welcome this time of renewed hope for the future. Festive lanterns — in red, for luck — are common decorations at such celebrations, where they are frequently hung in rows. Lanterns were depicted on the stamp issued in 2008 for the Year of the Rat.

How to Order the First-Day-of-Issue Postmark

Customers have 60 days to obtain the first-day-of-issue postmark by mail. They may purchase new stamps at their local Post Office, or at The Postal Store website at www.usps.com/shop or by calling 800-STAMP-24. Customers should affix the stamps to envelopes of their choice, address the envelopes, to themselves or others, and place them in a larger envelope addressed to:

Celebrating Lunar New Year Stamp
Postmaster
421 8th Ave., Rm. 2929B
New York, NY 10199-9998

After applying the first-day-of-issue postmark, the Postal Service will return the envelopes through the mail. There is no charge for the postmark. All orders must be postmarked by March 9, 2009.

How to Order First-Day Covers

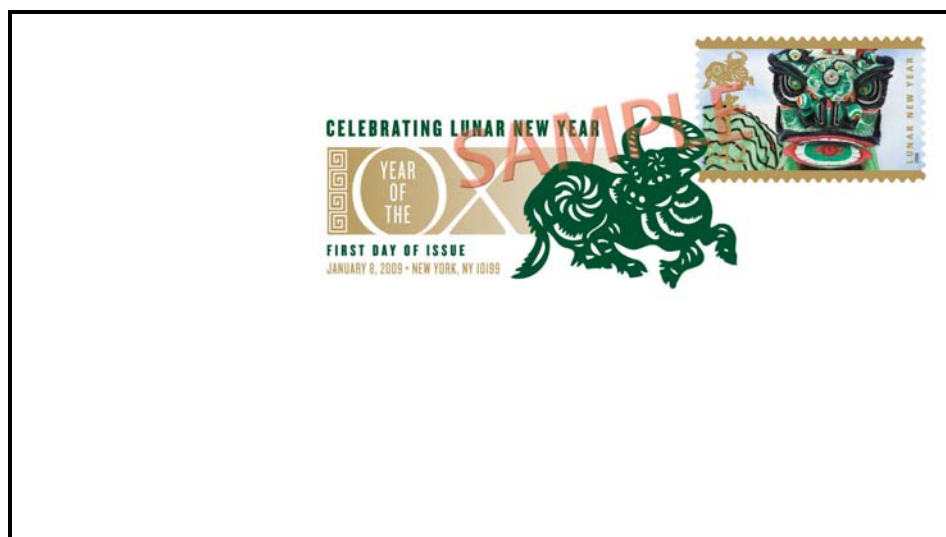
Stamp Fulfillment Services also offers first-day covers for new stamp issues and Postal Service stationery items postmarked with the official first-day-of-issue cancellation. Each item has an individual catalog number and is offered in the quarterly *USA Philatelic* catalog. Customers may request a free catalog by calling 800-STAMP-24 or writing to:

Information Fulfillment
Dept. 6270
U.S. Postal Service
Kansas City, MO 64121-9014

Philatelic Products

There are eight philatelic products available for this stamp issue:

- 573861, First-Day Cover, 80¢
- 573862, First-Day Cover w/Full Pane (B&W), \$7.54
- 573864, Cancelled Full Pane (Traditional B&W), \$7.54
- 573865, Digital Color Postmark, \$1.50
- 573884, Uncut Press Sheet, \$45.36
- 573891, Ceremony Program, \$6.95



- 573899, Cancellation Keepsake (Digital Color Postmark/pane), \$6.54



- 573894, Limited Edition Note Cards with envelopes and stamps (12 of each), \$13.95. Celebrate the Lunar New Year with this beautiful note card set. It includes background information about the Year of the Ox (Jan. 26, 2009, to Feb. 13, 2010). The set has all you need to send a stylish note to friends. It includes 12 note cards featuring three original illustrations inspired by the Year of the Ox; 12 corresponding envelopes; and, a sheet of 12 *Celebrating Lunar New Year: Year of the Ox* stamps.

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